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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

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R 030320Z APR 75
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1987
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 2027

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EGEN, PFOG, PINT, AF

SUBJ: NAWROZ (NEW YEAR) NEWS

1. SUMMARY. AS WITH OTHER PUBLIC AFGHAN HOLIDAYS, THIS NAWROZ (NEW YEAR, MARCH 21) SERVED AS FOCUS FOR RUMOR AND SPECULATION CONCERNING IMPENDING DRAMATIC GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS. THIS YEAR'S RUMOR CROP CENTERED ON CABINET CHANGES (A PERENNIAL); NEW CONSTITUTION TO INCLUDE A PARTY STRUCTURE; LAND REFORM; AND AN ENFORCED GRADUATED TAX. INCIDENTALLY, EXCEPT FOR CABINET CHANGES, ALL THESE WERE MENTIONED BY PRESIDENT DAOUD IN "BLITZ" (INDIA) INTERVIEW MARCH 8 AND IN KANDAHAR SPEECHES MARCH 17 DURING STOPOVER ENROUTE BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND IRAQ. HOWEVER, NO SUCH ANNOUNCEMENTS WERE MADE. WHAT WAS ANNOUNCED FOR NAWROZ WERE PRICE INCREASES FOR SUGAR, PETROL AND DIESEL FUEL, OCCASIONAING EXPRESSIONS OF DISSATISFACTION, PARTICULARLY SINCE MARCH 7 AND 8 BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENTS LED TO GENERAL EXPECTATION THAT PRICE OF SUGAR AND GASOLINE WOULD NOT BE INCREASED. END SUMMARY.

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2. EVERY MAJOR PUBLIC HOLIDAY SINCE JULY 1973 COUP HAS SERVED

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AS FOCUS FOR RUMOR AND SPECULATION CONCERNING MAJOR CABINET CHANGES, PROMULGATION OF NEW CONSTITUTION AND PARTY STRUCTURE, NEW LAND REFORM LAW, OR OTHER DRAMATIC OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS. WHILE RUMORS OF CABINET CHANGES WERE MORE MUTED THIS NAWROS (NEW YEARS DAY, MARCH 21), PERHAPS DUE TO REALIZATION THAT DAOUD PREFERS TO EFFECT PERSONNEL CHANGES MORE INCREMENTALLY, CERTAIN EXPECTATIONS AS TO WHAT MIGHT BE ANNOUNCED HAS BEEN AROUSED BY PRESIDENT DAOUD'S MARCH 8 INTERVIEW WITH "BLITZ" (INDIA) CORRESPONDENT AND SPEECHES DURING HIS KANDAHAR STOPOVER MARCH 17 ENROUTE FROM BANGLADESH TO IRAQ AND GOA BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENTS ON MARCH 7 AND 8.

3. DAOUD'S TAPED (IN PART) NAWROZ SPEECH, FOLLOWED BY PUSHTU VERSION READ BY ANNOUNCER, WAS BROADCAST ON RADIO KABUL EVENING MARCH 20 AND PUBLISHED IN KABUL TIMES MARCH 23. SPEECH WAS VIRTUALLY SAME AS GIVEN IN 1974: A CALL FOR PATRIOTISM, NEED FOR UNITY, SACRIFICE, AND COOPERATION IN OVERCOMING AFGHANISTAN'S BACKWARDNESS; REASSURANCE THAT GOVERNMENT IS HONEST AND SERVES THE PEOPLE; MENTION OF HOPEFUL FARMING PROSPECTS BECAUSE OF GOOD SNOWFALL; NEW YEAR'S CONGRATULATIONS TO THE AFGHAN PEOPLE AND ALSO CONGRATULATIONS TO AND HOPE THAT "PUSHTUNISTAN AND BALUCH BROTHERS" WILL HAVE COMPLETE SUCCESS.

4. PROMINENT NON-EVENTS WERE ABSENCE OF ANNOUNCEMENTS OF NEW CONSTITUTION, LAND REFORM LAW, AND GRADUATED TAX. WHILE RUMORS OF NEW CONSTITUTION WERE NOT AS STRONG AS LAST YEAR, THEY HAD BEEN FUELED BY DAOUD'S MARCH 17 SPEECHES IN KANDAHAR (KABUL 1835) PROMISING CONSTITUTION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A RPT A PARTY. NEITHER WERE LAND REFORM LAW NOR GRADUATED TAX ANNOUNCED, THOUGH IN TRANSCRIPT OF DAOUD INTERVIEW WITH "BLITZ" CORRESPONDENT PUBLISHED IN KABUL TIMES MARCH 8 (KABUL 1596,1631) BOTH WERE MENTIONED AS TAKING FINAL SHAPE "THIS YEAR", A PHRASE TAKEN BY MANY AFGHAN CITIZENS AND SOME OFFICIALS AS REFERRING TO YEAR 1353 WHICH ENDED MARCH 20.

5. OF PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANCE WAS AN EVENT FOR WHICH THE PUBLIC WAS NOT PREPARED: THE NAWROZ ANNOUNCEMENT THAT PRICES OF SUGAR WERE INCREASED FROM 24 TO 30 KILOS PER KILO, PETROL
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FROM 8 TO 8.5 AFS. PER LITER, AND LESS UNEXPECTEDLY DIESEL FROM 6 TO 8 AFS. IN BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENT PUBLISHED KABUL TIMES MARCH 8, IT HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED THAT SUBSIDIES WOULD CONTINUE ON SUGAR AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS. WHILE THERE IS NO INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN BUDGET AND PRICE INCREASE ANNOUNCEMENTS SINCE SUBSIDIES ARE BEING MAINTAINED, GENERAL EXPECTATION WAS THAT SUGAR AND GAS PRICES WOULD NOT INCREASE. MANY AFGHANS RECALL THAT MARCH 7 KABUL RADIO BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENT

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SPECIFICALLY STATED THAT SUGAR AND GASOLINE PRICES WOULD NOT BE INCREASED. LACK OF MENTION OF DIESEL LED TO WIDE-SPREAD BELIEF THAT DIESEL PRICE WOULD RISE. ANNOUNCEMENT OF INCREASES HAS LED TO WIDESPREAD GRUMBLING IN BAZAARS WITH COMMENTS, EVEN VOLUNTEERED TO FOREIGNERS, SUCH AS "PRICE INCREASES ARE DAOUD'S NAWROZ PRESENT TO THE PEOPLE" AND "THE GIFT DAOUD BROUGHT FROM IRAQ."

6. COMMENT: GOA'S INEPT HANDLING OF PRICE INCREASE EXPECT-ATIONS PROBABLY RESULTED IN MORE VOCAL CONSUMER DISCONTENT THAN UNWELCOME RISE IN SUCH BASIC COMMODITIES WOULD HAVE OCCASIONED IF PEOPLE HAD BEEN PREPARED FOR THEM. AS IT WAS, NAWROZ DAY BROUGHT NOT ONLY UNSEASONABLE SNOW TO KABUL, BUT ALSO MORE OPEN EXPRESSIONS OF DISSATISFACTION THAN WE HAVE BEEN ACCUSTOMED TO HEAR.
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